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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4816  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001347

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SUBJECT: Darfur Food Survey Shows Mixed Results for 2009

1. (SBU) Summary: The World Food Program (WFP) Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) has surveyed Darfuri households since the start of 2009 to track trends in food security across the region. The implementing food aid community has become increasingly concerned that many camp-based internally displaced persons (IDPs) expect food aid into the foreseeable future. Food aid implementers want to begin a gradual shift in food aid programming from general food distribution (GFD) to a broader community-based focus. Recent FSMS surveys have identified that food security improved in most of South Darfur this year. However, FSMS identified a significant deterioration in food security in West Darfur. End summary.

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Darfur FSMS Fully Operational  
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2. (U) WFP introduced FSMS in early 2009 to track the food security status of households through conducting surveys in specific geographic regions throughout Darfur. FSMS enables WFP and its CPs to better anticipate, prepare for, and respond to crises. FSMS is conducted quarterly in February, May, August, and November of each year. These months are strategically chosen in order to capture important seasonality data, while also influencing WFP's commodity programming decisions. FSMS focuses on trends and changes in food security. The data collected is statistically representative for the sampled locations (camps or villages) but cannot be generalized to the state or Darfur-wide level. However, the 16 to 22 sentinel sites in each the three Darfur states are chosen to be indicative of similar locations, as well as of broader geographical areas of similar characteristics, while also representing broad residential status and all types of food aid interventions.

3. (U) FSMS collects information on individual households' food consumption, income, and coping strategies utilized when facing food shortages. A wide range of data is collected, but the core indicators include: 1) a food consumption and expenditure composite indicator; 2) a food consumption score; 3) the income proxy (total expenditure per capita per day); 4) the proportion of expenditures spent on food; and 5) a coping strategies index. In addition, FSMS monitors market prices, secondary data on local rainfall patterns, and insecurity. The program is now fully operational, and WFP has confidence in the professionalism and dedication of its FSMS staff, its methodology, the accuracy and timeliness of the data gathered, and senior WFP staff members' resulting ability to use FSMS as a decision-making tool. Replacement sentinel sites in each state are used when insecurity prevents visits to the original site(s). WFP is now able to track, compare, and contrast survey results over time by state, by indicator, by quarter, and by sentinel site for all Darfur.

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14. (SBU) Following the March 2009 expulsions, significantly fewer international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are present on the ground in Darfur, with a concomitant reduction in monitoring capacity for field operations. Thus, timely confirmation of security conditions favoring returns will be harder to verify. Several affiliate NGOs are working to resume expelled NGOs' programs, but the protracted process of registration and staffing necessitates additional time for these affiliate NGOs to regain momentum and capacity. This reality places an even greater emphasis on the quantitative and qualitative food aid management monitoring tools are in place on the ground.

15. (SBU) There is broad consensus within the food aid implementing community that IDP camp head counts and beneficiary re-verifications are largely counter-productive efforts that result in security incidents. However, food aid implementers also generally agree that the GFD distribution status quo cannot, and should not, continue indefinitely. The ration size for the GFD has been reduced over the past year to roughly 70 percent of the official full ration, and, in some very specific cases, to as little as 50 percent of the original ration for non-IDP beneficiaries. While originally, the reduction was a necessity due to commodity pipeline breaks caused by route insecurity during much of 2008, the ration cuts did not result in significant, discernable negative impact on the beneficiary population. Based on this experience, coupled with recommendations provided by an international panel of experts that WFP contracted in early 2009, WFP took further steps to refine its food distribution strategies.

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16. (U) In the third round of the Darfur FSMS assessment, which was conducted during August, FSMS staff surveyed 1,596 households throughout Darfur. Roughly 40 percent of the households surveyed are female-headed households, and the average household size is seven persons. In South Darfur, the August FSMS reported that physical security had improved for the population at large, but not the international community, since the last FSMS monitoring, with no security incidents or population displacement reported. (Note: Since the August FSMS, displacements have occurred in northwestern Shearia locality in South Darfur. End note.) While the third-round FSMS data collection was conducted in the middle of the hunger gap period (which runs from June to September), food security improved in most of the sampled locations in South Darfur compared to the previous FSMS quarter. A considerable increase in total household expenditures was also noted in nearly all FSMS-sampled South Darfur locations. This increase is attributed primarily to the increased demand for agricultural labor required to prepare land in advance of the rainy season, with more employment opportunities resulting in a more stable income for poorer day laborers.

17. (U) In West Darfur, FSMS survey results identified a significant deterioration in the food security status of the resident population due to a sharp increase in local market food prices and the high vulnerability of resident communities to market fluctuations. The West Darfur FSMS confirmed that agricultural labor was by far the most important income activity for all three community types, including IDPs in camps, IDPs living among host communities, and resident populations during the third round. FSMS was also able to highlight that, due to continued poor rains in the south of the state, income levels have continued to drop, particularly for residents of Foro Baranga locality. The third-round FSMS in West Darfur also confirmed that a large proportion of households in all three community types were cultivating this season, attributed to perceptions of a more stable physical security environment.

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Comment  
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18. (SBU) The sample FSMS monitoring snapshots from South and West Darfur demonstrate the sharp locality focus that FSMS can provide to a food aid implementing community interested in better resource

targeting. When these FSMS snapshots are combined with WFP's SOS distribution, food basket, and post-distribution monitoring from the final distribution points, WFP and CPs will have the type of focused data required to transition from a large-scale general distribution modality, which has been the status quo for the past six years, to more targeted programs designed to address the needs of specific beneficiary groups. While these shifts will not occur overnight and will likely present many challenges to WFP and its partners, the end result should be more effective and efficient use of the considerable food aid resources under WFP management. End comment.

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